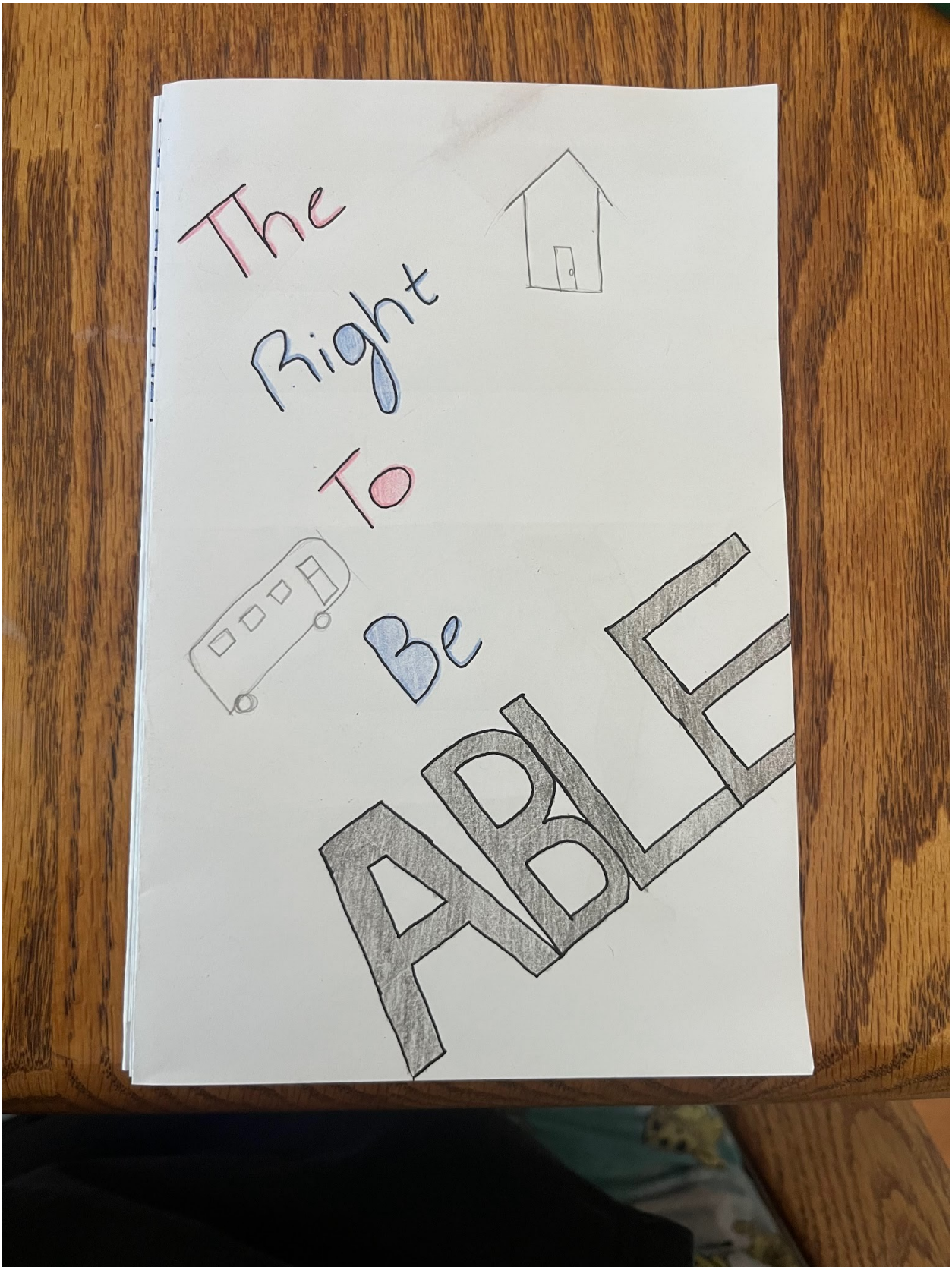

The
Right
To
Be
ABLE

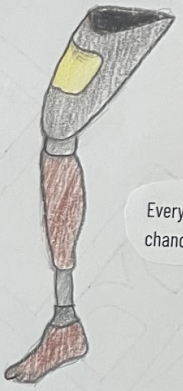
What are Disability Rights?

ADA

So what are disability rights? Disability rights are the fundamental rights that provide those with a *disability, whether mental or physical,* equal opportunities, protections from discrimination and harm, *and access to housing, education, and employment.*

Disability rights grant those with disabilities the ability to fit into our fast moving and changing economy. "The ADA Protects People with Disabilities" (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division).

Activism for disabilities has been dated back to the 1800s, but the ADA, or the Americans with Disabilities Act, was not founded until 1990, which was kick started by a few other organizations that occurred prior. It is thanks to these organizations that the harm that has been done to these individuals is being changed and prevented.



Everyone deserves the chance to thrive and live, without these rights, a large group of society loses the chance to be human. Let's give everyone a chance and fight for disability rights.

History of Disability Rights

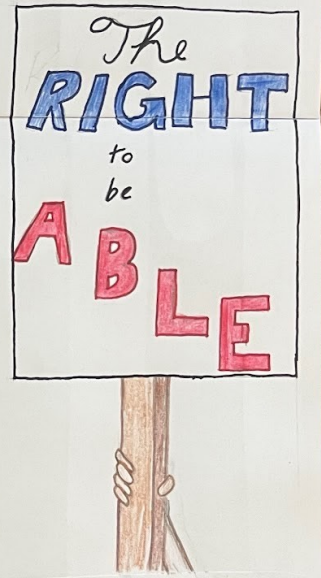
Before there were rules and rights put into place, anyone who seemed "different" was treated as so. Those who had a mental or cognitive disability were institutionalized. Those who used service animals were refused service, being told they could not afford anything in the stores. After looking through many different studies, there is a consensus that before the ADA was put into law, roughly 68% of individuals with disabilities were unemployed, or unable to hold a job.

In the 1800s, there were various disability groups coming together to fight for disability rights. It was not until the 1900s that the ball for disability rights really started to roll. "The League of the Physically Handicapped organized in the 1930s, fighting for employment during the Great Depression," (Meldon, Disability History: The Disability Rights Movement). In the 1940s, a group of patients formed We Are Not Alone.

Disability rights activists hold historic Pride Day

BOSTON—In the tradition of the gay pride and Black power movements, the first-ever Disability Pride Day was held here Oct. 6. More than 400 people marched, drove, wheeled and moved from City Hall to Boston Common in a demonstration to affirm that, "far from tragic, disability is a natural part of the human experience," according to the platform statement by the Disability Pride Day Coalition.

Pride activism from the Disability Rights Movement 1985-1995



President Truman formed the National Institute of Mental Health during his presidency. President Kennedy helped organize multiple planning committees that worked towards treating and researching disabilities. These two together helped to impact the minds of many Americans towards creating the ADA.

How are the ADA and Other Disability Rights Laws Changing People's Lives

The ADA is broken up into five sections; Employment, State and Local Government Services and Public Transit, Businesses That Are open to the Public, and Telecommunications

Employment: this Title I requires employers to provide individuals with disabilities the same treatment and opportunities as those without disabilities

State and Local Government Services and Public Transit: these two parts of Title II require government, both state and local, to provide and promise equal opportunities to benefit from their programs, services, and activities as well as provide easy and accessible transportation.

Businesses That Are open to the Public: Title III requires companies and businesses to ensure that their *stores or services are accessible to all*

Telecommunications: Title IV requires all phone companies to provide services that will help individuals with hearing and/or visual impairments.

Organizations such as ADAPT, which at the time stood for Americans Disabled for Accessible Public Transportation but now stands for Americans Disabled Attendant Programs Today, and CIL, Center for Independent Living, were created by two students at UC Berkeley, Ed Roberts and John Hessler. These two individuals lived with physical disabilities and could not find housing for attending UC Berkeley. They were forced to live at the Cowell Memorial Hospital. It is thanks to these two individuals that college housing has become more accessible.

Ed Roberts and John Hessler

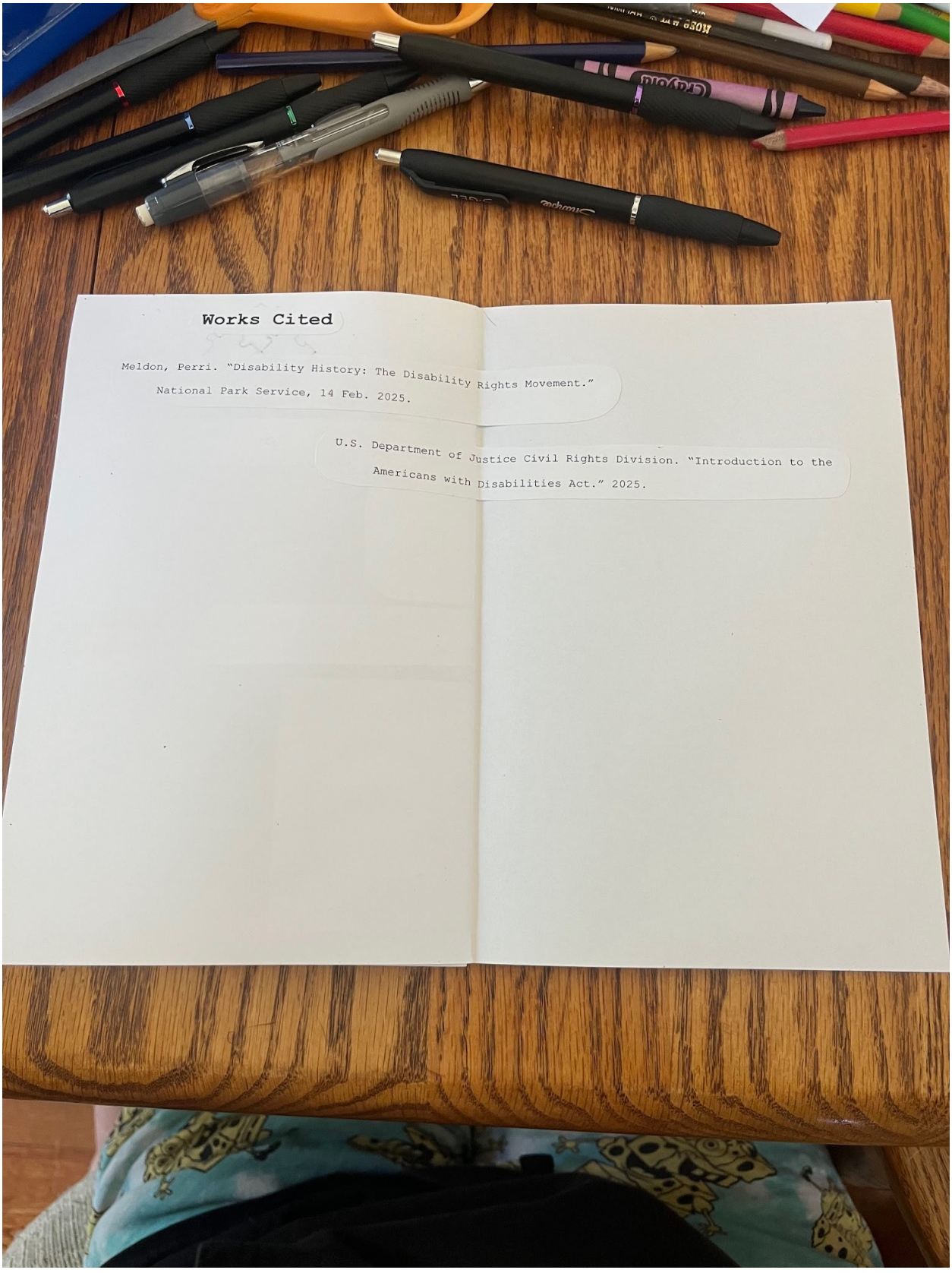
What Can You Do?

Those who live with disabilities have the loudest voice. Sharing your experiences of living with a disability and fighting for equal rights is the fastest way to spread information about what needs to be done. That is what Ed and John did to fight for equal housing opportunities.

If you do not live with a disability, talk to someone who does. Find out how different your experiences through life are, what's similar. Ask them what they want to make the world more accessible to them.

Attend rallies and meetings about disability rights. Join a community that is fighting for a change in how people view individuals with disabilities. There are organizations such as the AAPD (American Association of People with Disabilities), NDRN (National Disability Rights Network), and DRC (Disability Rights California) that fight for disability rights. The AAPD fights for full civil rights of Americans with disabilities. The NDRN fights to protect and expand the civil rights of individuals with disabilities. The DRC fights for equal opportunity and independent living for individuals with disabilities.

Be aware of what you say and think about this group of people. The biggest change starts with yourself, once you change how you view individuals with disabilities, you are able to fight for them.



Works Cited

Meldon, Perri. "Disability History: The Disability Rights Movement." National Park Service, 14 Feb. 2025.

U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. "Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act." 2025.